DEPARTMENT OF STATE

BRIEFING PAPER

R 158

HOW AMERICANS PERCEIVE NATO AND THE NATO COUNTRIES

SUMMARY

The proportion of Americans who believe the U.S. should help defend its European allies against Soviet attack rose from 48 percent in 1975 to 74 percent in mid-1980.

However: Responses to a poll question asked last spring showed that Americans discerned sizable differences in how several of the NATO allies (Canada, Britain, West Germany, France) responded to various U.S. initiatives, such as the Olympics boycott. The perception that this country's allies have backed U.S. initiatives with varying degrees of enthusiasm could have a dampening effect on the public's willingness to back various allies when they seek U.S. support. It might also have a dampening effect on overall support for NATO.

END SUMMARY

Public's Willingness to Defend Allies

Public support for U.S. defense commitments has risen substantially since the mid-1970's. Several polls conducted this year have shown that about two-thirds of the public favor sending U.S. troops to help defend regions perceived to be vital to U.S. interests--Western Europe, Japan, and the Persian Gulf. A Harris poll last February, for example, found a 67-23 percent majority favored the "use of U.S. troops if Western Europe were invaded."

Potomac Associates' polls show the steady increase since 1975 in the public's willingness to "come to the defense of its major European allies if any of them are attacked by the Soviet Union":

	Help Defend Major European Allies		
	Favor	Oppose	Don't Know
July 1980	74%	19%	7%
Feb. 1980	70	17	13
Sept. 1979	64	26	10
April 1978	62	26	12
May 1976	56	27	17
August 1975	48	34	18

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Americans' Commitment to NATO

U.S. polls are notable for lack of specific reference to NATO. The most recent question on NATO, asked in November 1978, showed a clearly discernible increase in the American public's support for the U.S. commitment to NATO. Two-thirds of the public wanted the U.S. either to maintain its present commitment (58 percent) or to increase it (9 percent). Only 13 percent of Americans wanted either to decrease our NATO commitment (9 percent) or withdraw entirely (4 percent). In late 1974, only 54 percent wanted the U.S. to maintain or increase its commitment to NATO, compared to 20 percent who wanted to reduce or terminate it

Support on Afghanistan and Iran Rated

A Roper poll last spring asked respondents to rate the support various "allies" have given to U.S policies regarding Iran and Afghanistan. Canada ranked first in American esteem. A majority of more than two-to-one believed Britain had supported U.S. positions "strongly enough." On the other hand, a comparable two-to-one majority believed France had not. West Germany fell in between:

Support for U.S. Positions on Iran and Afghanistan

Country	Have Supported U.S. Strongly Enough	Have Not Supported U.S. Strongly Enough	Don't Know
Canada	71%	11%	18%
Britain	53	22	25
West Germany	37	31	32
France	15	53	32

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